

John O'Ferrell Store
County Road 400 N
Mongo
La Grange County
Indiana

HABS No. IN-148

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

THE JOHN O'FERRELL STORE

HABS No. IN-148

LOCATION: County Road 400 N, Mongo, La Grange County, Indiana.

PRESENT OWNER AND OCCUPANT: Carroll and Esther van Buskirk

PRESENT USE: Antique and Gift Store

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: One of the first commercial structures in Langrange County, Indiana, the building was a focal point in the early events and history of Mongo. Built as a general store, it also served as post office, distillery outlet, and even informal courtroom during its history. The building is a good example of 19th century construction techniques and detail.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Early History of Mongo

L. K. Brownell first located claim and invested in the construction of a dam across Pigeon River and a grist mill. He finished both in the summer of 1831.

Pottawatomie Indians were also located there and remained during early settlement.

A distillery was erected near the mill to make whisky for the Indians (who were unscrupulously cheated for their furs by early traders) and settlers.

John O'Ferrell, a native of Ireland, erected a small storeroom in 1832 in which he operated a general store with an inventory of about \$400. Brownell was probably part-owner. (This is the beginning of what was to become The Olde Store.) It served as a post office for a short time. The hotel and blacksmith shop also opened in 1833.

B. The Olde Store and its Owners

John O'Ferrell operated his general store for four years until 1836 when he was supposedly run out of town for "treating the whites as unscrupulously as the Indians". O'Ferrell was one of several perpetrators, including Brownell, of an Indian scare known as the "Gage and Langdon War". This occurred during the Black Hawk War in 1832 when many settlers in Mongo and Springfield Township feared an Indian attack.

Drusus Nichols purchased the mill property as well as O'Ferrell's store and the distillery in 1836. He increased the worth of the store to \$6000 and continued a

successful business untill he died in 1848.

The property of the store, mill, and distillery passed on to Robert Dykes in 1848.

Edmond Shepardson gained the store property in 1865 and continued its operation until his death in 1882. The property was deeded to his brother, Samuel Shepardson, and his wife Catherine, however, on February 12, 1870.

Catherine Shepardson deeded the property to Mary A. Keefer on May 18, 1889 - the lot of exactly the same description as the present site. The store stayed in the Keefer family for over 65 years, during which time the additions to the original structure were probably made.

Mary A. Keefer deeded the property to her son, Alpharus M. Keefer on May 18, 1929.

Zola M. Keefer and children were the next recorded owners, receiving the property as inheritance from Alpharus M. Keefer on September 25, 1953.

Zola M. Keefer deeded the store property to Walter B. Sturgis, administrator of the state, on May 29, 1965. The property, though, had to be offered to sell to family before signed for proper selling release. This ended the Keefer Claim.

Walter B. Sturgis immediately sold the store to its present owners, Carroll and Esther van Buskirk on June 11, 1965, with the same provision as the previous sale.

C. Date of Erection: 1832

D. Architect: The designer of the original building was its builder, John O'Ferrell.

E. Alterations and Additions

Several additions to the original building on the south, east, and north sides were built during its history, but the exact dates are not known. It is thought by the owner that they were probably all built by the turn of the century. The front porch on the original building included a balcony for the second floor living quarters. This balcony is shown on old sketches and is also evidenced by the door on the second floor facade. This balcony was also removed at an unknown date and the porch roof shingled over, as it exists today. Interior partitions for the second story living quarters of the original structure were removed by the present owner in order to make room for antique storage of the present business.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character: The Olde Store contains a variety of classical ornamentation, primarily Greek revival, and is of sturdy hand hewn oak construction.

2. Condition: Exterior materials are deteriorating, and are in some spots dilapidated, but the sturdiness of construction is indicative of it's long life and future potential for restoration.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Size: The original structure is two stories with a full attic and also full cellar. In plan, the building measures 25 feet by 46 feet and is 30 feet tall at roof peak.
2. Foundations: Brick and Stone
3. Wall Construction: Wood Frame
4. Structural System: Post and beam, barn-style construction. Six interior wood columns support the floor construction. Oak is the major material.
5. Porches: One porch is on the front of the building, and another is in the southeast corner (a later addition).
6. Chimneys: There are no chimneys on the original building.
7. Openings: Windows - Double-hung, single glazed, wood frame. Upper floor windows have shutters attached. Windows on the later additions are wood frame of mixed types.

Doors - Solid wood. Aluminum storm doors have been added to the double entrance doors on the facade.
8. Roof: Mixed pattern asphalt shingle, except for the south side addition which is a standing seam metal roof.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor Plans:
 - a) Basement: The basement is entirely open except for the wood structural columns. Foundation walls and first floor joists are exposed, and the floor is of concrete.
 - b) First Floor: The front doors enter into the main retail space of the original building. In the rear of this room are three entrances in the the respective

additions which are presently used for antique display and storage. A small bathroom was added. The stairs to the basement and upper floor are located in the northeast corner of the large showroom.

- c) Second Floor: Partition walls for living spaces originally divided this space, but they were all removed, and the entire floor is used for storage purposes. The remaining partitions enclose the attic stairway on the north side of the space.
- 2. Stairways: All stairways are enclosed, with the attic stairs on the second floor being enclosed in a separate room.
- 3. Flooring: On both the first and second levels, the flooring is of hardwood strips.
- 4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: Walls on both floors are covered with wallpaper. Ceilings on both floors have been refinished with modern acoustical tile.
- 5. Doorways and Doors: Both doors and their frames are wood .
- 6. Trim: A large, elegant butternut wood molding is used all around the ceiling on the first floor. This type of molding was not known untill approximately 1848.
- 7. Hardware: Metal locks, hinges, and other hardware of many types are used around the building. The original key to the front entrance still exists.
- 8. Lighting: All lighting on the first floor is by incandescent lamps hung from the ceiling. On the second level, incandescent bulbs from ceiling sockets serve the lighting needs.
- 9. Heating: A gas furnace in the basement.

D. Site

- 1. General Setting and Orientation: The main axis of the building runs east-west, with the facade facing east. The building itself is located on the southwest corner of the site adjacent to the two corner streets. A round wooden storage shed is also located on the site adjacent to the building on the north side.
- 2. Walks: Concrete walks give access to the building on the south side along 300 North Road, and on the east side leading up to the front porch.